



INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND COMMITMENTS

“We all know the story about the man who sat by the trail too long, and then it grew over, and he could never find his way again. We can never forget what has happened, but we cannot go back. Nor can we just sit beside the trail.”

Pihtokahanapiwiyyin (Chief Poundmaker, 1842-1886)

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2008-2015, the national shift toward reconciliation underscored the critical role of post-secondary institutions in shaping public leadership and governance. For the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy (JSGS), this responsibility aligned directly with Call to Action 57, which emphasizes education for public servants on Indigenous histories, rights, treaties, and Aboriginal–Crown relations, alongside competencies in intercultural understanding, human rights, and anti-racism. In response, JSGS formally identified Indigenization as a strategic priority in its 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, committing to Reconciliation through Indigenous engagement, outreach, and inclusion in policy dialogue.

Building on this foundation, JSGS significantly expanded Indigenous focused programming and community partnerships. The School developed important partnerships with UiT the Arctic University of Norway (2012), First Nations University of Canada (2022), and Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (2022). These partnerships contributed to JSGS programming such as the Master of Governance and Entrepreneurship in Northern and Indigenous Areas (GENI), the Indigenous Nation Building Graduate Certificate (INBGC), the Executive Education (EE) in Indigenous Leadership program, and the Kiskēiyhtamowina First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv) Board Governance program. The School’s 2021–2025 Strategic Plan further strengthened this commitment by establishing the overarching goal to “embed Indigenous perspectives consistently throughout all our programs,” while deepening engagement with Indigenous organizations, governments, northern communities, and First Nations University of Canada. The University of Saskatchewan’s gifting of ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan in 2021 provided an additional grounding framework, informing how JSGS operationalizes its commitments to safety, wellness, stewardship, representation, right relations, creation, and renewal.



In advancing the Schools' strategic commitment to *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan*, the Executive Team guided the initial implementation efforts by aligning early actions with the creation of the JSGS Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committee. This approach was intended to ensure coherence across institutional priorities and to embed Indigenization within broader equity objectives. However, within the EDI committee, Indigenous priorities and perspectives were frequently diluted by the wide scope of other EDI initiatives. As a result, Indigenous voices were not always being heard, and strategic objectives did not receive the dedicated attention required to advance the School's Indigenization strategies. In response to these challenges, the JSGS leadership established a stand-alone sub-committee focused specifically on strategic initiatives for the School with a mandate to prioritize Indigenous engagement, leadership, and long-term strategic alignment. While this subcommittee of the EDI Committee made valuable progress with regards to assessing the JSGS commitment to the *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan*, the School recognized that placing this work within the purview of the EDI Committee failed to bring adequate attention to the goals of Indigenization and Reconciliation.

As a response to ensuring adequate space and representation, in 2025 JSGS created the Committee for Listening and Acting for Reconciliation (CLAR) to initiate, implement, guide, and evaluate Indigenous initiatives, both academic and non-academic, at the School. This committee normally meets three times a year. Also created in 2025, the Indigenous Voices for Transformation Subcommittee (also known as "Voices") vets matters and initiatives before they are presented to CLAR. The purpose of the subcommittee is to ensure that the Indigenous members are heard and that they have a safe place to discuss matters. Members (comprised of JSGS Indigenous faculty, staff, executive in residence, students, and alumni) govern themselves and meet as needed a minimum of six times per year.

The creation of these committees, combined with the following examples, demonstrate the work that JSGS has done to uplift Indigenous voices, create sustainable pathways for Indigenous student success, recognize the efforts and achievements of Indigenous faculty and staff, and contribute to *critical systems change* in the policies and procedures of the School.

BUILDING CAPACITY AND LEADERSHIP

JSGS is committed to advancing Reconciliation through concrete actions that strengthen Indigenous human capacity and Indigenous leadership within the School. JSGS is working to deliver on this commitment by investing in Indigenous-led roles and initiatives, creating culturally welcoming learning environments, expanding Indigenous student recruitment and support, and building institutional capacity among faculty and staff. Together, these efforts reflect an intentional, ongoing approach to embedding Indigenous leadership, relationships, and accountability into how JSGS teaches, learns, and governs.

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

JSGS created a full-time staff position to lead Indigenous initiatives, with a strong focus on recruiting and supporting Indigenous students. Hired in this position in 2022, Marilyn Black served both campuses (U of R and USask) as our Indigenous Student Recruitment and Initiatives Coordinator. While it was challenging to support both campuses, the Coordinator organized events and activities that provided meaningful opportunities for staff and faculty to engage with Elders and knowledge keepers and support Indigenous students. Regular highlights included lunch and visits at First Nations University of Canada (Regina), lunch and learn sessions at the ta-tawâw Student Centre (U of R campus), Soup and Bannock lunches at Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre (USask campus), and the JSGS annual all-day Indigenous learning events (held at the USask campus in 2025, Dr. Niigaan Sinclair provided the keynote address for this event and participated in discussions with students, alumni, staff, and faculty throughout the day).

Under Marilyn's leadership, recruitment efforts have been very successful, with 36 Indigenous students currently enrolled at the USask campus and 29 at the U of R campus.

It is important to also note that the Coordinator was responsible for many of the changes to the physical environments inside and outside the Diefenbaker Building.





CULTURAL REVITALIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

When Marilyn began the work of implementing changes within and adjacent to the Diefenbaker Building, she noted that there was very little to no Indigenous presence in the space. Since the environment itself was not reflecting the people, cultures, or histories connected to the building, it was the natural place to start the Reconciliation work.

The first action was putting up a set of flags in the building lobby. At first, this seemed like a simple step, but it quickly became a much deeper learning experience. Elders were involved and shared teachings about the flags, including the meaning behind the spear top and why it needed to be respectfully replaced. That guidance mattered and helped ensure the work was done in a meaningful way, with intention and not just as a visual addition. As the work grew, more flags were added to the lobby, including the Two-Spirit flag, the Reconciliation flag, and the Pride flag. Having the flags in the lobby of the building really set the tone: the space communicates that Indigenous identities are respected, and that inclusion matters at JSGS.

One of the most meaningful moments came when a current student shared that as soon as he walked into the building, he felt an immediate sense of connection and belonging. That feedback confirmed that these changes are doing what they are supposed to do. They are not just about what the building looks like, but about how people feel when they walk through the door.

From there, attention turned to the artwork throughout the building. Twenty-four pieces were replaced with works by Indigenous artists, and a lot of care went into the pieces selected and where each was placed. The goal was to ensure Indigenous presence was felt everywhere, not tucked away in one spot. One example is an original piece by Métis artist and storyteller Leah Dorion, which was placed outside the Diefenbaker gallery, so it is one of the last things people see when they leave the building. That placement was intentional; it invites reflection and reminds people that Indigenous stories are central, not secondary. This is especially critical in a space that houses a school of public policy.

A key partnership developed with the Diefenbaker Canada Centre after the museum curator reached out to the Coordinator for consultation on upcoming exhibit installations. From the beginning, there was a clear intention to include Indigenous content in a meaningful way, which led to ongoing collaboration. One unexpected outcome was the transformation of the micro-exhibit space adjacent to the lobby. Once used mainly for storage, it is now a welcoming community space for gathering, learning, and sharing. Several installations were developed together. One focused on traditional medicines and was led by Elder Mary Morin, who brought harvested medicines from her land and shared teachings through a hands-on display open to the public and school groups. Another installation was created with Leah Dorion, who shared personal and family items such as moss bags, moccasins, children's toys, books, and artifacts. This installation also welcomed the public and many school groups, creating opportunities for storytelling and community learning.

Through this work, the Diefenbaker Canada Centre has built capacity to lead its own Indigenous-focused events and learning opportunities, including Red Dress Day acknowledgements. Overall, the space has shifted from storage to purpose and is now regularly used for sharing circles, storytelling, and teachings, demonstrating the impact of working in relationship and re-imagining existing spaces.



Another important shift was around ceremony. Smudging now happens regularly in the building. Requests have increased, and even groups that rent the space now hold ceremony here. Smudging is no longer treated as something unusual; it has become a normal part of how the space is used.

Reconciliation work also moved outside the building. TRC and MMIWG banners were installed to make those commitments visible to the broader community. There have been challenges, especially when it comes to making things permanent. Requests were made to have flags on the exterior of the building, but limited finances and capacity made that difficult. It has not all gone smoothly, but the conversations with university governance continue, and the advocacy has not stopped.

Overall, this work was not about big gestures. It was about small, intentional changes that added up over time. Changing how the space looks, feels, and is used shifted how people relate to it. The result is a stronger sense of visibility, respect, and belonging, and this is work that will continue, not something that is ever really finished.

RESEARCH CHAIR IN MÉTIS GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

Since 2022, Dr. Kurtis Boyer has served as the first JSGS Research Chair in Métis Governance and Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. This chair was made possible through funding from and in partnership with Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN-S). This chair has been significant not only as an academic appointment, but as a strategic institutional asset that has strengthened JSGS’s and USask’s capacity in Métis governance, Indigenous public policy, and applied engagement with Indigenous governments. Unlike a conventional research chair focused mainly on scholarship, it was explicitly structured to support Métis governance capacity, develop governance and policy training for MN-S, build institution-to-institution collaboration, and ensure that research serves practical governance needs. In this role, the Chair has acted as a bridge between JSGS, MN-S, and the wider university, translating Métis governance priorities into teaching, research, institutional processes, and collaborative initiatives. Dr. Boyer’s work has been recognized in senior governance and institutional settings, including invitations to present to the Senate of Canada, service on key university committees, and advice to university leadership on Métis governance, citizenship, and distinction-based institutional issues. Together, these activities reflect the Chair’s relevance to broader policy, governance, and university-wide discussions.

A central component of the Chair’s work is JSGS 800: Métis Governance, a graduate course created by Dr. Boyer and built around direct collaboration with MN-S. Students work on live MN-S policy files and produce applied reports used by government, making the course a clear mechanism for linking teaching to real governance needs. Dr. Boyer has created two other courses: JSGS 896 Indigenous Nation Building in Canada and (with Dr. Danette Starblanket) JSGS 898 Creating the Humble Servant: An Introduction to First Nation and Métis Policy and Governance. Dr. Boyer’s contributions to teaching were recognized with the 2025 Lieutenant Governor’s Indigenous Teaching Excellence Award. In research, Dr. Boyer has published on Métis citizenship, governance, and epistemic injustice, and has received national recognition through the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) Alphonsine Lafond – Tom Molloy Memorial Fellowship. His approach has consistently focused on making research directly useful to Métis governments. This is exemplified in *A Vision of the Nation*, a major research report examining the inclusion of seven communities into the Métis Nation of Ontario and its implications for Métis legitimacy, governance, and identity. Developed through the broader *Visions of the Nation* project, this work brought together leading Métis scholars to produce coordinated, evidence-based analysis grounded in Métis understandings of nationhood, community, and governance.



Through his participation in an annual land-based learning day at Batoche, creation of new graduate courses in Indigenous nation building and Métis governance, development of a core curriculum focused on Indigenous policy and governance, and leadership training for MN-S officials, Dr. Boyer's work has been a form of service and mentorship. He has supported graduate students through supervision, advising, and the creation of applied research opportunities that connect students directly to Métis governance work. This has included facilitating scholarships, research assistantships, and pathways into MN-S employment, while mentoring students in how to engage respectfully and effectively with Indigenous governments. At the same time, this work serves both the university and MN-S by contributing to curriculum reform, respectful engagement frameworks, Indigenous learning requirements, and broader distinction-based institutional change. Together, these contributions reflect a sustained commitment to building capacity, supporting students, strengthening governance, and advancing institutional development in ways that extend beyond the classroom.

PARTICIPATION IN ANTI-RACISM/ANTI-OPPRESSION TRAINING PROGRAM

From September 2025 to April 2026, the JSGS Acting Executive Director and several JSGS-USask staff and faculty participated in this eight-module non-credit course (2.5 hours per month). Led by Liz Duret, the University's Senior Consultant for Inclusion, Diversity and Anti-Racism, this program challenged us to engage with difficult themes such as white privilege, white supremacy culture, intersectionality, liberal racism, colour-blind racism, institutional racism, allyship, microaggressions in the workplace, and Indigenization in the Canadian Academy. Many of us agreed that one of the most relevant required readings for the course was Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz' "Indigenization as Inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy," published in *Alter Native: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* (2018).

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION TRAINING

In each of the past two years, JSGS hosted an all-day Indigenous Reconciliation event for faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The intent of these events was to advance JSGS's Reconciliation efforts through learning, dialogue, and critical reflection. The first event featured JSGS alumnus and current Chancellor of the University of Regina Cadmus Delorme as the keynote speaker in November 2024, followed by University of Winnipeg Professor Niigaan Sinclair as the keynote speaker in October 2025. Building on the strong engagement generated by these events, while also recognizing that JSGS continues to have much to learn in the space of Reconciliation, JSGS leadership has supported the Voices subcommittee's request to establish an annual Indigenous speaker event with a dedicated budget. The School is planning for an event with author Jean Teillet in fall 2026.

CHALLENGES: SAFEGUARDING INDIGENOUS LEADERS AND COLLEAGUES

JSGS is mindful of the responsibility to safeguard Indigenous faculty and staff who are frequently called upon to lead complex and emotionally demanding Reconciliation and Indigenization work, both within the School and across the institution. While JSGS recognizes that this work appropriately belongs to the entire school community, engaging all faculty and staff in this shared responsibility continues to be a challenge. We have seen a trend that the same faculty and staff are showing up for the Indigenous initiatives and activities. We need to continue to find ways to engage the whole JSGS community to participate and lead the work together.

The role for JSGS to ensure safety beyond the School presents additional complexities within a broader institutional context. To support these measures, JSGS leadership and the whole School community continue to work toward supporting Indigenous faculty and staff through thoughtful attention to workload, expectations, and care, while navigating system-wide pressures that are not always within the School's direct control. This approach reinforces the importance of sustaining Indigenous leadership roles in ways that promote wellbeing, continuity, and long-term capacity.



PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM CONTENT

Over the last five years, JSGS focused on creating accessible and culturally grounded pathways for Indigenous students to pursue graduate studies by meeting learners where they are academically, professionally, and geographically. This focus is reflected in the development and delivery of an Indigenous-centered graduate certificate that can serve as a strong pathway into a full master's degree and executive and non-credit programs that can serve as entry points into further graduate study. Programs such as the Master of Governance and Entrepreneurship in Northern and Indigenous Areas (GENI) and the Indigenous Nation-Building Graduate Certificate (INBGC) intentionally integrate Indigenous and western policy perspectives while offering flexible delivery options that allow students to remain connected to their communities as they advance their education.



During the ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan strategic time period (2021-2026), JSGS has launched, renewed, and developed several Indigenous-focused programs and courses.

LAUNCHING THE INDIGENOUS NATION-BUILDING GRADUATE CERTIFICATE



Through its partnership with First Nations University of Canada, in 2022, JSGS announced the launch of the Indigenous Nation-Building Graduate Certificate with the first students enrolled in January 2023. This online certificate (with a three-day residency) provides students with an in-depth understanding of the traditional and modern governance approaches Indigenous nations are taking as they assert self-determination and self-governance. It is designed to meet the needs of Indigenous leaders and practicing public administrators, policy analysts, and non-profit administrators who wish to enhance their conceptual and technical skills in the fields of public administration or public policy, as related to Indigenous peoples and communities.

One indicator of the success of the INBGC is that four of the Indigenous graduates of this program have gone on to enroll in the online and in-person MPA programs. This certificate has become an important pathway into other graduate programs, especially for Indigenous learners who have encountered barriers and often do not see themselves reflected in these academic spaces.

One strong example is Dale Apesis, a First Nations student who entered through the mid-career entry pathway without a completed four-year undergraduate degree. After completing the INBGC, he enrolled in the MPA program. Dale shared that he never imagined himself in a master's program and that the certificate helped him see that it was possible. He also spoke about feeling genuinely supported throughout the process.

Sara Arial, a Métis student and mother of four with a senior position in municipal government, is another important success story. An INBGC graduate and current online MPA student, Sara was the recipient of a USask Indigenous Student Academic Achievement Award in 2026.



Stories like Dale's and Sara's show why it is critical to continue creating and sustaining these pathways. We need more Indigenous voices in our programs and in high-level decision-making roles. A key challenge, however, is funding, particularly for certificate programs, despite their proven impact in opening doors and supporting transitions into graduate studies.

RENEWAL OF THE PARTNERSHIP WITH UiT THE ARCTIC UNIVERSITY OF NORWAY

In 2023, JSGS and its partner, the Centre for Sámi Studies at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, initiated a review of their international partnership and of the GENI program. This review was undertaken as part of required institutional processes and served as a critical evaluation of the program's original intent to provide relevant and responsive graduate education to northern and Indigenous communities. The GENI Program Review Committee includes representatives from leadership, faculty, staff, and alumni from both institutions. Central to the review was the meaningful engagement of Indigenous students and alumni, whose lived experiences and perspectives were positioned as a core driver of the review process.

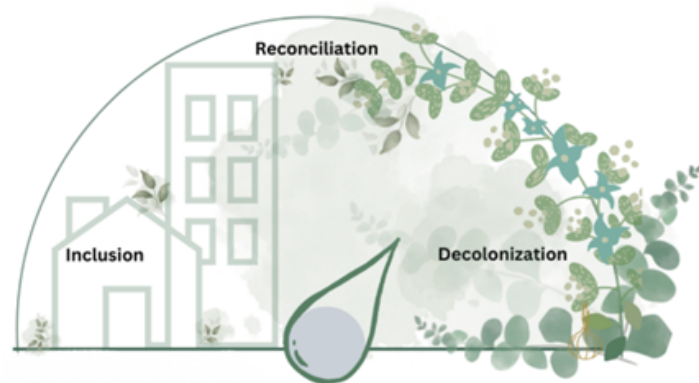
As part of the program evaluation, a special study was completed by Emmy Stavostrand Neuls for her Doctor of Education (EdD) in Educational Leadership program in 2022-2025. The study conducted a summative, constructive evaluation of outcomes across the GENI program and its international field schools. Guided by the Gaudry and Lorenz framework (2018), the study found that the GENI program provided relevant graduate education and offered practical lessons for decolonizing academic programming. Indigenous alumni of the program played a central role as participants in the research and data analysis process, contributing directly to the interpretation of findings and the identification of key themes. The study found, in particular, that global study abroad activities can offer practical insights into decolonizing internationalization and study abroad experiences.



The analysis illustrated how a decolonized study abroad model can foster personal, academic, and professional growth, symbolized by the vibrant plants (see below), reflecting Indigenous students' learning journeys and transformative experiences.

The GENI Program Review Committee completed the program and partnership review in 2025 and is currently working on a substantially revised program based on the feedback from the review.

Figure 1: The GENI Program International Field Schools within the Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) Indigenization Framework.



Note. Adapted from Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14 (3), 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>

CREATING THE HUMBLE PUBLIC SERVANT COURSE

In 2024-25, JSGS Indigenous faculty, staff, and Executives-in-Residence began developing a core Indigenous-content course, Creating the Humble Servant: An Introduction to First Nation and Métis Policy and Governance. The learning objectives were developed by the Voices subcommittee, while the course content development was led by Drs. Kurtis Boyer and Danette Starblanket. This course presents an introduction to Indigenous policy development and implementation in Canada with a focus on Métis and First Nations in Saskatchewan and the prairies. It is intended to provide students with the foundations needed to pursue policy learning related to Métis and First Nations people and their governance systems. The course has three overarching learning objectives:

- Deconstructing misconceptions and gaining knowledge of Métis and First Nations ways of knowing and doing in relation to policy and policy development;
- Understanding Métis and First Nations policy in order for students to relate to Canadian policy; and
- Connecting the fundamentals of Indigenous policy to current public policy.

Given the time required to implement overall program changes, JSGS 835/898 Creating the Humble Public Servant will be offered as an elective during the 2026-27 academic year while necessary program revisions are initiated and completed so the course can eventually be implemented as a required course.

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



The Executive Education unit at JSGS has prioritized Reconciliation by working with great partners and looking for opportunities to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into our curriculum and offerings.

In 2025, JSGS was humbled to welcome Honourable Russ Mirasty (LLD), the first Indigenous Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan (2019-2025), as an Executive-in-Residence. Russ' contributions to JSGS are shared between the two campuses and the Executive Education unit. In fall 2025, EE recorded brief vignettes with Russ on various topics including balancing traditional ways of knowing with modern systems, Indigenous engagement, leadership, and governance. These interviews were then added to program curriculum and shared with students and participants throughout numerous programs.

Regarding specific programming, EE partnered with First Nations University of Canada to develop and deliver two programs:

- The **Indigenous Leadership Program** is a two-day workshop aimed at equipping Chiefs, Councillors, and Senior Band Leaders with essential leadership skills and tools they will use to implement good governance in their Nations. This program has been delivered since 2019 and has been primarily funded through annual successful applications to Indigenous Services Canada in collaboration with Nations interested in the training. Participants receive a Certificate of Attendance.
- The **First Nations University of Canada Board Governance Program** was created by JSGS in 2021. This four-day non-credit program (with exam and First Nations Board of Director's Professional Designation of FN.DIR) is delivered twice a year publicly and then by request from Nations and Indigenous organizations.

CHALLENGES: REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS VOICES AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS WITHIN JSGS PROGRAMS AND COURSE CONTENT



JSGS set a strategic goal to embed Indigenous perspectives consistently throughout all of our programs. In 2024, the School completed a scoping study to identify and compile all Indigenous content within JSGS programs. The study found that among 89 course syllabi, only 13 courses wholly embedded Indigenous content, while 35 had some Indigenous content and 41 had no Indigenous content. The courses that had wholly embedded Indigenous content were part of the GENI and INBGC programs, with a few of the courses being part of the MPA program and the research programs.

Following this review, the Voices Subcommittee assessed Indigenous content within the MPA program and determined that much of it had been developed by non-Indigenous faculty and peoples. As a result, this content was removed for fall 2024 delivery, and work was initiated to develop the Creating the Humble Public Servant course. This decision reinforced the importance of strengthening JSGS's course development processes to ensure Indigenous content is led, developed, and governed by Indigenous scholars and voices. While this approach created a short-term reduction in Indigenous content within the MPA, it reflects JSGS's commitment to addressing foundational issues in how Indigenous content is created and governed. The School is proceeding with care and respect, prioritizing Indigenous-led scholarship and governance to ensure future curriculum reflects both rigor and responsibility.

JSGS INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND OPERATIONS

JSGS has initiated the development and implementation of policies and processes to better support Indigenous faculty, staff and students.

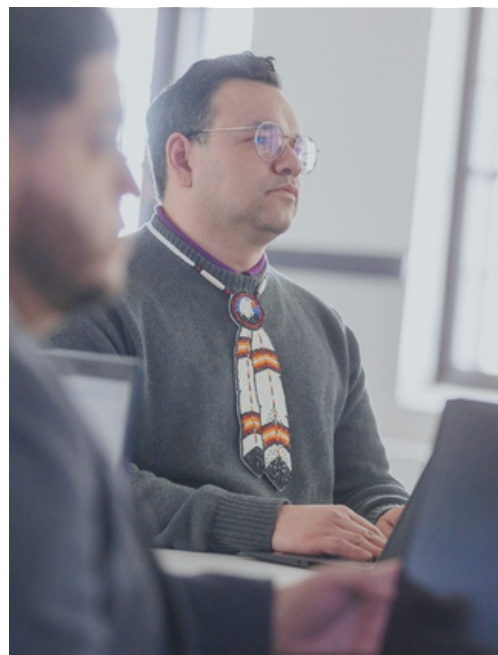
INDIGENOUS STUDENT-CENTERED POLICIES

With the goal of removing barriers to graduate education for Indigenous students, JSGS has developed and implemented several initiatives designed to support access, entry, and participation in JSGS programs. The policies were developed in response to feedback and requests provided by students throughout their engagement with JSGS.

In 2022, a non-standard application process was introduced for the INBGC, as well as for the Social Economy, Co-operatives, and the Non-Profit Sector Graduate Certificate. This application pathway provides access to graduate education for applicants who have not completed a bachelor's degree. The non-standard process uses a holistic review approach, enabling applicants to demonstrate their readiness for graduate-level study through professional experience, leadership, community engagement, and career attainment, rather than relying solely on traditional academic credentials. The majority of students who entered JSGS through this route were Indigenous applicants.

In 2025, JSGS received approval from the USask Fee Review Committee to exempt from the \$1,000 non-refundable tuition deposit all verified Indigenous applicants when accepting admission to the INBGC, MPA, and OMPA programs.

In addition to exemption for the non-refundable tuition deposit, JSGS provides an application fee waiver for Indigenous applicants to all JSGS programs on a case-by-case basis. The School plans to institutionalize this process for fall 2026. Both the application fee waiver and the tuition deposit exemption are supported by the *deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin* process for Indigenous membership/citizenship verification led by the USask Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement.



JSGS CHARTER FOR RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT

The JSGS Charter for Respectful Engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nations was developed in response to recommendations from the Voices Subcommittee, with leadership from Dr. Kurtis Boyer and input from the CLAR. The Charter is intended to guide JSGS in fostering respectful, responsible, and relationship-based engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities in all operations and activities whether it be outreach activities, research or programming. Grounded in a Reconciliation-driven, community-first approach, it emphasizes the importance of humility, meaningful partnerships, and recognition of Indigenous sovereignty. The Charter also seeks to move beyond pan-Indigenous approaches by promoting distinction-based engagement that honours the unique identities, governance structures, and perspectives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nations.

REVISION OF OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

In late 2024, JSGS-USask submitted a revision of its Standards for Promotion and Tenure to the University Review Committee (URC). More specifically, these revised standards proposed that research-based policy and governance contributions made in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments and organizations be included in Category 4 (“Research, Scholarly and/or Artistic Work”). However, concerned that processes outlined in these revised standards would potentially place an additional burden on Indigenous communities, the URC did not approve the revised standards and in 2025 recommended that JSGS have further discussions about the proposed language for Category 4. JSGS will continue to work on these revised standards with the goal of resubmitting them to the URC in 2026-27.

CHALLENGES: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, STEWARDSHIP, AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Advancing meaningful institutional change requires more than individual academic unit initiatives. It is a shared responsibility and requires stewardship at the university level. Implementing policy-based change is a complex and resource-intensive process that requires sustained effort over extended periods of time. In practice, responsibility for identifying, justifying, navigating, and implementing policy reforms often rests with individual academic units. This places a significant administrative and relational burden on faculty and staff who must continually advocate for equity-focused policies within institutional structures that were not designed with Indigenous learners or Indigenous ways of knowing in mind.

As illustrated by the attempt to revise JSGS-USask standards, progress can be slow, uneven, and, at times, discouraging. This experience demonstrates the continued need for centrally coordinated responses that support academic units in overcoming institutional barriers and advancing Reconciliation.

CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS STUDENT AND ALUMNI STORIES

Despite the ongoing challenges, it is important to emphasize JSGS's successes in advancing the School's commitments to Reconciliation. In particular, we want to highlight Indigenous students and alumni whose learning journeys, leadership, and contributions enrich JSGS and extend beyond the classroom. Their experiences, insights, and achievements continue to shape policy spaces, strengthen communities, and advance Reconciliation in meaningful ways. Through their work, they exemplify the impact of Indigenous leadership in public service and policy innovation.

JSGS INDIGENOUS GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD WINNERS

This section highlights students who have been awarded prestigious University of Saskatchewan College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) scholarships. Notably, three JSGS students have received the highly competitive Indigenous Graduate Leadership Award, which covers the full cost of program tuition. In addition, JSGS has proactively supported and recognized incoming students through the newly established Indigenous Graduate Student Recruitment Scholarship, further demonstrating a strong commitment to attracting and supporting Indigenous student success.

- Daniel Coles (PhD candidate) – 2025 Indigenous Graduate Recruitment Scholarship
- Laura Fraser (current MPP, incoming PhD student) – 2026 Indigenous Graduate Student Recruitment Scholarship
- Sarah Gauthier (PhD candidate) – 2022 Doctoral Indigenous Graduate Leadership Award
- Brooke Laliberte-Pewapasonias (incoming MPA) – 2026 Indigenous Graduate Student Recruitment Scholarship
- Eileen Lennie-Koshman (incoming MPA) – 2026 William Dixon Indigenous Graduate Scholarship
- Alayna Ningeongan (GENI) – 2025 Indigenous Graduate Leadership Award
- Lauren Wallingham (GENI) – 2021 Indigenous Graduate Leadership Award
- Brianna Yew (incoming MPA) – 2026 William Dixon Indigenous Graduate Scholarship

USASK INDIGENOUS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

One of the most exciting times of the year is the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous Achievement Week (IAW), an annual event that celebrates the accomplishments of Métis, First Nations, and Inuit peoples across campus. During this week, JSGS is proud to present an Indigenous Student Award, recognizing their outstanding achievement. To support participation in these celebrations, travel bursaries are provided to students who are located outside of Saskatoon, ensuring they can celebrate their achievements.

- Sara Arial (OMPA, 2026) – 2026 Indigenous Student Award (Academic Achievement)
- Jason Mercredi (OMPA, 2026) - 2025 Indigenous Student Award (Community Engagement)
- Victoria Gagne (GENI, 2026) -2024 Indigenous Student Award (Academic Achievement)
- Susan Nerberg (GENI, 2026), -2024 International Indigenous Student Award
- Heather O'Watch (MPP, 2021) – 2023 Indigenous Student Award (Leadership)
- Yvette Nolan (MPP, 2024) -2022 Indigenous Student Award (Community Engagement)
- Lauren Wallingham (GENI, 2021) – 2021 Indigenous Achievement Award (Academic Achievement)
- Jocelyne Wasacase-Merasty (PhD Candidate) – 2020 Indigenous Student Award (Leadership)

HIGHLIGHTING JSGS STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

JSGS is committed to showcasing the successes and contributions of Indigenous students through its website and outreach activities. This visibility affirms that Indigenous students belong in these spaces and are thriving in academic, research, and community-engaged work. The following section features a selection of student profiles and stories drawn from the JSGS website.

- Dr. Merelda Fiddler-Potter (PhD, 2024) – 2025 recipient of the Distinguished Professional Achievement Award and Associate Professor, First Nations University of Canada.
- Victoria Gagne (GENI, 2026) – A New Journey
- Avery Kewistep (MPA, 2024) – works for the Government of Alberta, Ministry of Indigenous Relations, and recently received the Top 30 under 30 Award by the Albert Council for Global Cooperation.
- Neal Kewistep (MPA, 2011) – 2024 recipient of the Outstanding Impact Award and former Executive-in-Residence at JSGS.
- Marcia Mirasty (MNGD, 2018) – Advocating for future generations of Indigenous Peoples in Saskatchewan
- Susan Nerberg (Master's, GENI, 2021) – Bringing a voice to environmental concerns in the North
- Jillian Senécal (GENI, 2024) – Revisioning Child Welfare
- Robert St. Denis (OMPA, 2023) – Respect, leadership, and learning the ins and outs of public service
- Cassandra Opikokew Wajuntah (PhD, 2022) – Cassandra Opikokew Wajuntah is blazing a trail for others to follow
- Heather O'Watch (MPP, 2021) – Finding her place
- Lauren Wallingham (GENI, 2021) – Lauren Wallingham, JSGS GENI student, receives USask Indigenous Achievement Award
- Jacob Woodbeck (OMPA, 2024) – Rare work-life balance in pursuit of higher education
- Ian Worme (MPA, 2021) – JSGS Graduate has a life-changing experience on first day of class

INDIGENOUS ALUMNI CURRENTLY SERVING JSGS

JSGS values the voices and experiences of Indigenous students and alumni and is committed to ensuring these perspectives are meaningfully integrated into both our committee work and decision-making processes.

- Chris Belhumeur, (MPA, 2020), – Senior Indigenous Advisor, Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement; 20-plus-year career with the Government of Saskatchewan; Member of the JSGS Voices Subcommittee
- Heather Hallgrimson (MPA, 2015), – Manager for Cabinet and Legislative Affairs, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan; JSGS Alumni Association Mentor
- Robin Miller (OMPA, 2023) – Director of Health, Mental Health & Addictions, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan; Member of the JSGS Voices Committee
- Jillian Senécal (Master's, GENI, 2024) – Member of the GENI Program Review Committee
- Dr. Danette Starblanket (PhD, 2023) – tenured Assistant Professor, JSGS-U of R; Chair of the JSGS Voices Subcommittee; elected member of the University of Regina Board of Governors (2026).



STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS 2026

As part of JSGS'S external review process (2025-26), the School conducted a student survey. We were pleased to see that the vast majority of responses to questions about Indigenous cultural learning opportunities at JSGS were very positive. Some examples:

- "I think that JSGS incorporates indigenous perspectives and content well. JSGS also has an excellent indigenous support coordinator/advisor."
- "Opportunities to visit indigenous sites and discuss Indigenous-centered topics during residencies was highly valuable and memorable. Indigenous health course was also excellent."
- "Prior to commencing my MPA program, I knew nothing about the Indigenous. I owe everything I know now to JSGS."
- "I've learned more about Indigenous culture and issues in the first semester of this program than any other educational program I've taken."
- "I liked that we had meetings with elders. I could learn Indigenous culture better from them than in the class setting."
- "The visit to Batoche was an excellent opportunity to learn Indigenous culture."
- "The Métis governance class was interesting and illuminating."
- "I think overall it is great that professors invite Indigenous speakers to discuss various topics, and there are always indigenous elements within the syllabus."
- "I really enjoyed the opportunities during my Master's Certificate of Indigenous Nation-Building. Participating in the 2025 Building Reconciliation Forum was excellent!"



CONCLUDING REMARKS: FUTURE GOALS AND CHALLENGES

As USask's ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan strategy explains: "ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan requires courage because its essence is dynamic discomfort that is required for revolutionary growth." (p.5) Achieving *critical systems change* at JSGS requires commitment, courage, and persistence. Some future goals for 2026-28:

- Given the impactful work done for JSGS by Marilyn Black, her retirement in April 2026 was a great loss to the School. To maintain momentum and build on her efforts to support the principles of Reconciliation, JSGS plans to hire a new Indigenous Student Recruitment and Initiatives Coordinator in fall 2026. The priorities for the new Coordinator will be recruitment and retention of Indigenous students.
- JSGS-USask will resubmit to the URC revisions to their Standards for Promotion and Tenure (specifically Category 4, "Research, Scholarly and/or Artistic Work") to include research-based policy and governance contributions made in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments and organizations.
- JSGS will submit a proposal to the USask Fee Review Committee to exempt all verified Indigenous applicants from paying the fee required by USask when applying for admission to a JSGS program.
- JSGS will finalize and implement the "JSGS Charter for Respectful Engagement."
- JSGS will work to ensure Indigenous core content is developed and integrated into the MPA programs.
- Creating the Humble Servant: An Introduction to First Nation and Métis Policy and Governance, developed by Dr. Kurtis Boyer and Dr. Danette Starblanket, will be co-taught by them as an elective for the first time in January 2027. In future, JSGS will aim to make this a required course.

